

Visual Glosa #3: Caring for the Iconic Works of Siza Vieira

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No dia seguinte, nos deslocamos para Leça da Palmeira, onde visitamos dois dos projetos mais emblemáticos de Álvaro Siza Vieira: a Casa de Chá da Boa Nova e, mais adiante, as Piscinas das Marés. Ambas as obras operam por uma lógica de enraizamento no território, numa arquitetura que emerge das pedras e do mar, produzindo relações coreográficas entre espaço, corpo e paisagem.

We arrived at the Boa Nova Tea House early in the morning, before the official opening of the restaurant that now occupies the space. Without customers yet, the place was silent, yet in motion: staff moved discreetly between the tables, setting cutlery, adjusting objects, folding napkins with precision. It was possible to sense the backstage work activated daily to sustain the luxury experience that was about to unfold. The building, one of Siza's first projects, was built in 1958. A sequence of rooms guides the gaze, framing the sea from different perspectives. Wood, glass, and concrete engage with the landscape, establishing a discreet dialogue with the coast and the horizon.



Staff member preparing the space before opening to the public inside the Boa Nova Tea House.

Transformed into a Michelin-star fine dining restaurant, the building has been incorporated into a circuit of luxury consumption. Access is mediated by protocols of asepsis: plastic shoe covers, limited time of stay, restricted circulation. The architecture, originally conceived as a public and accessible shelter for contemplating the landscape, has become a setting for exclusivity. It is worth remembering, however, that the Tea House went through a period of ruin. A severe storm destroyed a significant part of its interior, leaving the building abandoned for years. Only later, in the context of a renewed appreciation for modern heritage, was the space restored and reopened to the public, although with a different function.

The transformation of the space's use raises questions about the fate of modern buildings: what forms of appropriation and meaning survive when architecture is subjected to the forces of market and tourism? What experiences are lost, and which are established, when the building is reconfigured as a luxury object? The Tea House, originally imagined as a public, accessible shelter connected to the territory and daily life, has now become a place of exception. What remains of its public condition? Who can, in reality, inhabit it?

We then walked to the Leça Swimming Pools, a project inaugurated in 1966. The path proposed by the architecture also reveals a choreographic dimension. Access to the site is not direct. First, one passes through a dark corridor, with an indus-



trial atmosphere, leading to the changing rooms. From there, a sequence of small transitions between changes in flooring, texture, and light prepares the body for the encounter with the sea. Before seeing the ocean, the visitor must walk along a concrete wall that delays the revelation of the landscape. In this gesture, the sea is not offered immediately; the architecture mediates it.

Staff preparing the Piscina das Marés for the summer season, highlighting the maintenance work that sustains the functioning of the space.



We found the site still closed to the public, in preparation for the summer season. In front of us, the backstage of architecture was also revealed. Instead of the bustling seaside setting in operation, we saw the infrastructure at work: workers painting surfaces, cleaning areas, performing minor repairs in the pools, gestures repeated year after year to ensure the space can be used. As in the Tea House, where we observed the meticulous preparation of tables for the arrival of guests, here too the invisible work sustaining the architectural experience was evident.



This direct contact with the infrastructural dimension of the building resonates with the discussions proposed by Elke Krasny in the conference to be mentioned later. Architecture is not presented solely as form or image but also asserts itself as process, sustained by gestures of care, repair, and preparation. We witnessed the work necessary for a space to become available for use, and in doing so, the material and human conditions that sustain architecture over time became visible.

Crevise.
Crack.
Stone.
Sand.

At the same time, the mediation of these spaces continuously reaffirmed Álvaro Siza's authorship as a central mark of the experience. The act of naming, revering, and eternalizing prompts reflection on how architecture often anchors itself in almost mythical figures of authority, rather than in the collective processes that make these spaces possible. We visited works that, although conceived with extreme care in relation to the landscape and the body in space, were also embedded in a system that celebrates the individual and obscures the multiple voices involved in the construction, operation, and maintenance of these places.

On the architectural wall that blocks the direct view of the sea at the Leça Swimming Pools, a crack asserts itself in the concrete. In modernist architecture, this material often appears as a symbol of solidity, permanence, and also a certain promise of neutrality and uniformity, a matter stripped of ornament, capable of accommodating different programs under the same structural logic. Yet it is precisely on this smooth, controlled surface that the fissure stands out. The crack carries the passage of time inscribed in the body of the building, a reminder of erosion, use, failure, and the constant need for repair. Just as the storm that damaged the Tea House, this fracture disrupts the image of perfection and brings us closer to architecture as an organism: subject to strain, wear, and persistence. These are the marks, the ones beyond the author's control, that remind us that architecture lives not only in the inaugural gesture but also in its material and political continuity, sustained by practices of care, maintenance, and daily reinscription.



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PASSAGE OF TIME
INSCRIBED**

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